

Introduction

Indigenous Peoples have a rich history, and unique traditions, languages, and knowledge systems. However, colonialism and systemic assimilation led to the marginalization of the Indigenous cultures, resulting in the loss of critical components of the Indigenous way of life. To redress the legacy of the Canadian assimilationist policies, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was established by the Government of Canada in 2007 to help initiate a process of reconciliation with the Indigenous Peoples. The TRC issued calls to action to recognize the injustices created by the assimilation process and initiate reconciliation actions that will close the educational and economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples and ensure a better future for all Canadians. One of the most notable and important steps toward reconciliation was the call to implement culturally appropriate education for Indigenous children. This article will explain and discuss the importance of culturally appropriate education. By reviewing relevant academic sources, this article will first explain the importance of culturally appropriate education for Indigenous Peoples and their future. Secondly, the article points out the necessary resources for this kind of operation including government funding, and human resources, in addition to inviting the Indigenous elders and communities to get involved and act towards educating the younger generation. Finally, the paper will discuss the implementation of culturally appropriate education and the future of Indigenous education with implemented culturally appropriate education. Through this research, this paper will contribute to the ongoing debate on reconciliation and the preservation of Indigenous cultures for future generations.

Importance of Culturally Appropriate Education

The revelation of atrocities at the government-supported Residential Schools, and the assimilation plan targeted Indigenous Children that resulted in the traumatic experiences and deaths of hundreds of kids, has sparked a significant shift in the approach to Indigenous and government relations in Canada. Destroying a culture starts with blocking the transfer of knowledge between generations. Because of the Residential School System Indigenous knowledge and language were damaged significantly. As a direct response to these damages to Indigenous languages, TRC issued Call to Action #12, “We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families”. It is a way to The Canadian federal government began actively funding Schools and personnel geared towards preserving and promoting Indigenous cultures and languages (Jung, 2009). This move towards culturally appropriate education is not just a mere policy shift; it carries profound implications for Indigenous Peoples and their communities.

At its root, culturally appropriate education represents three critical endeavors. First, it acts as a symbol of recognition and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Battiste, 2013). For years, Indigenous communities fought for acknowledgment of the wrongdoings they endured, only to be met with silence, denial, or outright refusal by successive federal and provincial governments (Tait, 2016). But the surfacing of irrefutable evidence, sourced from documents and testimonies as well as the discovery of graves in Residential Schools, made the government confront its part in the Residential Schools. While this acknowledgment is a significant step, it is only the beginning of a long path toward genuine reconciliation, one that will require continued effort and understanding on both sides.

Education, especially culturally appropriate education, can play a crucial role in preserving Indigenous culture (Battiste, 2013). By weaving traditional knowledge, language, and practices into contemporary curricula, Indigenous children are empowered to reconnect with their rich heritage. This is instrumental not only in conserving an endangered culture but also in instilling a profound sense of identity and belonging among Indigenous students, (Huston et al., 2020).

Lastly, culturally appropriate education is an affirmation of the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging their existence and autonomy that predates colonial incursions by thousands of years. It is important for the general Canadian public to understand that there is no monolithic Indigenous identity; rather, multiple different nations of Indigenous Peoples exist, each sovereign over their own territory, traditions, and customs. When the settler colonists started to colonize the territory now known as Canada, they took this sovereignty and forced them out of their land (Simpson, 2011). Since historical wrongdoings are surfacing it is important to understand that reconciliation will not end without acknowledging what had happened throughout Indigenous history with settlers. Allowing Indigenous Peoples to make their own curriculum is a big step toward recognizing their sovereignty and their independence, which is a crucial part of reconciliation.

Unfortunately ensuring these values is not easy and requires commitment from both Indigenous communities and the Government of Canada. To successfully facilitate the implementation of culturally appropriate education programs, the Government of Canada

committed \$726 million over 5 years, and \$188 million is expected to be funded in 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023). This funding is small compared to the damage done by the government, this is why each Canadian province also committed a budget to Indigenous education and reconciliation, with the most notable commitment from Quebec with \$1 billion dollars committed to promoting education in Indigenous communities in Quebec (Thomas, 2022). Funding these initiatives is not an easy feat; much more challenging is training staff who will become teachers and eventually provide Indigenous children with a culturally appropriate education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In this issue, there are a lot of debates about whether only Indigenous teachers should teach Indigenous children (Huston et al., 2020). The debates arise from the fact that because of historical and ongoing trauma and marginalization because of colonization, for decades some Indigenous Peoples saw non-Indigenous Peoples with distrust and sometimes hostile views (Loppie, 2009). Because of these debates, the TRC published a statement stating that for reconciliation both Indigenous and Governmental help are needed; because of this they openly supported the idea of non-indigenous teachers teaching Indigenous kids, but they stressed educating the potential teachers for each community according to their culture and views, which will require time and money (AECEO Guiding Committee on Truth and Reconciliation, 2020).

Future of Indigenous Education with Implemented Culturally Appropriate Education

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the historical trauma that Indigenous communities have faced due to colonialism and the Residential School system. This legacy has manifested in various forms, including higher rates of poverty, incarceration, and challenges in education among Indigenous populations compared to non-Indigenous communities (Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Lack of trust in the mainstream curriculum is leading to more and more poor Indigenous communities and this cycle goes on and on (Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). One way to break this cycle and earn the trust of the Indigenous Peoples is by implementing culturally appropriate education models. Culturally appropriate education can lead to better education for Indigenous students (Wilk, Maltby & Cooke, 2017). It has been proven that Indigenous students who have access to culturally appropriate education have higher levels of academic achievement, increased self-esteem, and better mental health outcomes (Fleury, 2019). With the new government initiatives of culturally appropriate education and passionate individuals involved in this initiative, the future of Indigenous education seems promising. Recognizing and addressing the historical traumas faced by Indigenous communities, and integrating culturally appropriate educational frameworks, paves the way for a more dynamic and hopeful future for Indigenous youth and their communities.

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